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Let's Talk Turkey

By J. M. Lambert



EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE
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Let's Talk Turkey

by Josephine E. Brooks

Today you need not think of a turkey dinner as a seasonal treat. It is not necessary to wait until Thanksgiving or Christmas for your favorite bird. Any day can be turkey day. Turkeys can be bought whole, in halves, in quarters or by the piece to suit the size of the family and its tastes. Even a very small family can enjoy turkey any time of the year without having to cope with turkey leftovers for days on end. There are available such cuts as turkey quarters; turkey pieces as thighs, breasts, wings, or drumsticks; and cross-cut turkey steaks. And you do not always have to roast the turkey. In fact turkeys or turkey parts can be braised, fricasseed, stewed, fried or broiled as well as roasted. A good way to bring variety to your meals is to serve turkey frequently.

PREPARING AND ROASTING A WHOLE TURKEY

Preparation

Remove pinfeathers by using strawberry huller or tweezers or by catching them between thumb and paring knife. To loosen stubborn pinfeathers place bird in sink under stream of cold water and scrape stubborn spots with back of knife.

Singe bird if necessary, wiping dry if it has been wet.

Remove any bits of lung, kidney, etc., remaining in cavity.

Wash the outside well by rubbing with cloth or soft brush.

Rinse cavity with cold water. Drain bird thoroughly by standing it upright for a few minutes.

Stuffing the Turkey

The turkey may be stuffed just before it goes into the oven or several hours in advance. When you stuff it ahead of time, cool hot dressing before putting it in the turkey. Then wrap the stuffed bird loosely in waxed paper and refrigerate immediately at a temperature of 38° F. or less.

Don't pack dressing tightly. If you do, it will be soggy and bird may burst when dressing expands during cooking.

Turkeys may be roasted without dressing.

Roasting the Turkey

CORRECT ROASTING IS SLOW COOKING BY DRY HEAT ON A RACK IN AN OPEN PAN. It requires no water, no basting, no cover.

LOW TEMPERATURES ASSURE BETTER FLAVOR AND APPEARANCE, LESS SHRINKAGE AND LESS LOSS OF JUICES.

ROASTING GUIDE FOR WHOLE TURKEY

Ready to Cook Weight	Crumbs for Stuffing	Oven Temperature	Approximate Time
Pounds	Quarts	°F.	Hours
5 to 8 1/2	1 1/2 to 2	325	2 1/2 to 3
9 to 12	2 to 3	325	3 to 3 1/2
12 1/2 to 15 1/2	3 to 4	325	3 1/2 to 4 1/2
16 to 21	4 to 5 1/2	300	4 1/2 to 6
21 1/2 to 26	5 1/2 to 7	300	6 to 7 1/2

*Taken from Home and Garden Bulletin No. 1, U.S.D.A. Feb. 1950

A shallow open pan allows the heat to circulate around the bird, roasting it evenly.

A rack that fits the pan and is at least 1/2 inch high raises the bird off the bottom of the pan, keeping it out of the juices.

For best results, follow these simple steps in roasting--

1. Rub cavity with salt (1/8 teaspoon per pound of bird).
2. Put enough stuffing in neck to fill it out nicely and fasten neck skin to back with skewer.
3. Stuff cavity well, but do not pack tightly.
4. Truss bird and grease skin thoroughly with melted or softened cooking fat.
5. Place on rack in shallow pan, breast down.
6. Cover top and sides of bird with fat-moistened cloth--preferably clean white cheesecloth.
7. Place in preheated oven set at proper temperature indicated on timetable for your size turkey.
8. Do not sear. Do not cover. Do not add water.
9. Moisten cloth with fat from bottom of pan if cloth dries slightly during cooking.
10. Turn bird breast up when about 3/4 done if breast meat browns too slowly.

How to Tell When Turkey is Done

Because the times for roasting turkeys given in the table above are only approximate, a wise cook will want information on how to check the roasted bird for doneness.

To tell whether turkey is done, press the fleshy part of the drumstick with your fingers, protecting them with cloth or paper. It is done if the meat feels soft. Or move the drumstick up and down. If the leg joint gives readily or breaks, your turkey is done.

If you use a meat thermometer, your turkey will be done when a thermometer placed in the center of the inside thigh muscle registers 190° F., or when one placed in the center of the dressing registers 180° F. Be sure to follow manufacturer's directions for using thermometer.



PREPARING AND ROASTING A HALF TURKEY

Preparation

Rub cavity (cut side) with salt (1/8 teaspoon per pound of bird). Skewer skin to breast meat. Tie leg just above the knuckle joint securely to tail.

Ready for Oven

Place turkey, cut side down, on a rack in a shallow pan. Brush bird with melted fat and cover with fat-moistened cheesecloth. Roast in pre-heated oven set at 325° F. Allow about 25 to 30 minutes per pound.

Dressing

Allow scant 3/4 cup dressing per pound of bird purchased. Mound dressing on a well-greased double thickness of waxed paper to approximately the shape of the half turkey's cavity.

Dressing Meets Turkey

When the bird is about half done (1 1/2 to 2 hours) remove from oven and place paper with dressing on rack. Replace half turkey over the dressing and continue roasting until done. Bake extra dressing in pan last hour of roasting, basting with pan juices.



PREPARING AND COOKING TURKEY QUARTERS

Roasting the Quarter

Skewer skin to meat around edge of quarter to prevent shrinking from meat during roasting. If using white meat quarter, tie wing flat against breast. Or if using dark meat quarter, tie drumstick end to tail. Rub inside surface of turkey with salt allowing 1/8 teaspoon per pound. Place

cut side down on a rack in a shallow pan. Brush with melted fat and cover with fat-moistened cheesecloth. Roast in a moderate oven (325° F.) until meat is tender (about 3 1/2 hours). Spoon fat from bottom of pan to remoisten cloth if necessary during roasting. Prepare gravy with the pan drippings in the usual manner.

Test Doneness: Move drumstick or wing up and down. If the joint goes readily or breaks the turkey is done. Or press fleshy part of meat with fingers protecting them with a cloth or paper. If turkey is done the meat feels soft.

Braising the Quarter

Use turkey quarter. Blend 1/4 cup flour, 1 teaspoon paprika, 3/4 teaspoon salt and 1/8 teaspoon pepper for 4 1/2 to 7 pounds of meat. Rub thoroughly into turkey. Save leftover flour mixture for gravy. Brown turkey in moderately hot fat, about 1/2 cup, turning as necessary to brown evenly. Add 1/2 to 1 cup water, tomato juice or wine. Cover and simmer until tender, 2 1/2 to 3 hours. Test doneness by piercing thickest part with fork. Uncover last 15 minutes of cooking. If desired make gravy from drippings.



PREPARING AND COOKING TURKEY "BY-THE-PIECE"

Turkey "By-the-Piece" may be prepared by braising, roasting or stewing.

Braising

Turkey thighs, drumsticks and wings are ideal for braising.

1. Rub pieces with flour mixture: 3 tbsp. flour, 1 tsp. paprika, 1/2 tsp. salt and 1/8 tsp. pepper per pound. Save any leftover mixture for gravy.
2. Brown turkey well in moderately hot fat, about 1/2 cup.
3. Add 1/4 to 1/2 cup water. Cover and simmer until tender about 1 hour including browning time.
4. Uncover last 15 minutes of cooking.

Roasting

Drumsticks, thighs and breast pieces are good for roasting.

1. Place turkey pieces on a rack in a shallow pan.
2. Rub turkey with salt, about 1/8 teaspoon salt per pound.

3. Lay fat-moistened cheesecloth over turkey.
4. Do not cover pan. Do not baste. Do not add water.
5. Roast in a moderate oven (350° F.) until tender. Time: 1 1/2 to 2 hours including browning time.

Stewing

Such pieces as wings, neck, backs, etc., are effectively stewed, but any piece may be used.

1. Place turkey in kettle and add 1/2 tsp. salt and 1 cup water for each pound. Add 1 rib of celery, 1 small onion and 1 carrot.
2. Bring to boiling point. Remove any foam.
3. Cover and simmer 2 - 2 1/2 hours or until tender.
4. Cooked turkey meat may be used for stewed or fricasseed turkey, cold slicing, creaming or a la king, or pot pie, etc.
5. Turkey Fricassee: Drain cooked meat, cool slightly, roll in flour mixture given in Braising. Brown meat in 1/2 cup moderately hot fat. Serve with gravy made from the stock.



PREPARING AND BROILING A SMALL TURKEY

Use a young turkey weighing 2 to 4 lbs. Have turkey split lengthwise for broiling. Break drumstick, hip and wing joints to keep bird flat during broiling.

Flatten Halves - Skewer leg to body. Fold wing tip back under wing. Skewer wing flat against cut edge of backbone.

Season each half turkey with about 1/4 teaspoon salt and a sprinkling of pepper.

Place turkey in broiler pan (not on rack). Brush with melted fat and then place skin side down.

Broil Slowly. Place in broiler 5 to 7 inches under heat source. Regulate heat or pan position so that turkey just begins to brown lightly in 10 minutes. Cook slowly.

Turn and brush with fat two or three times during broiling to brown and cook evenly. Total cooking time: 50 to 60 minutes for 2 1/2 lb. ready-to-cook turkey.

Test for Doneness - The turkey is done when meat on the thickest part of the drumstick cuts easily and there is no pink color visible.

Serve on warm platter with pan drippings poured over turkey.

If giblets are served with broiled turkey coat the liver and precooked heart and gizzard with fat, season and broil just long enough to brown.



PREPARING AND BRAISING *CROSS-CUT TURKEY STEAKS

4-4 ounce steaks or 1 lb.	1 teaspoon paprika
1 teaspoon salt	1/8 teaspoon pepper, scant
1/4 cup flour	Milk
Fat for sauteing-about 2 tablespoons for 10" skillet	

1. Blend flour, salt, paprika and pepper.
2. Dip steaks in milk; then into flour mixture. Save any leftover flour for gravy.
3. Brown on both sides over moderate heat in a thin layer of fat, turning once.
4. Reduce heat, add 1 tablespoon water (or stock if available) for each steak (slightly less per steak if more than 6 steaks are being cooked in one pan).
5. Cover tightly and cook slowly 8 or 10 minutes or until tender.
6. Remove cover and cook 3 to 5 minutes longer to dry off the surface. Serve hot. Gravy may be prepared with the pan drippings.

These steaks may be braised also by omitting the milk and flour coating. Begin the directions with No. 3.

*Cross-cut turkey steaks are slices of the bird with bone left in. They are cut half an inch thick or thicker.